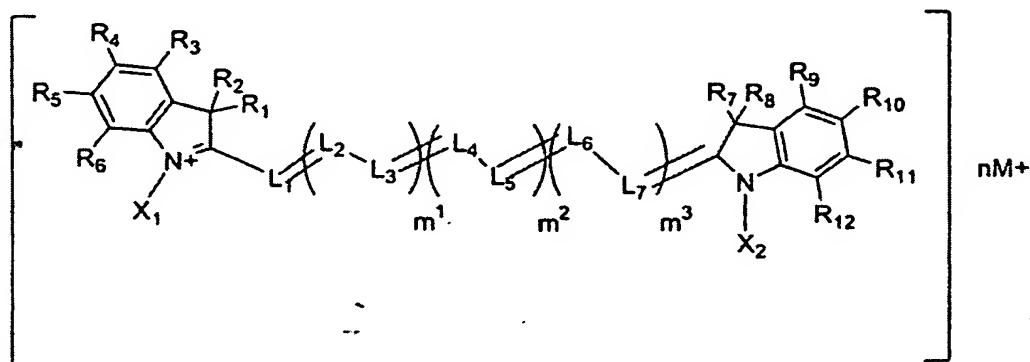


This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Original) A near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising a compound represented by the following formula [I] or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:

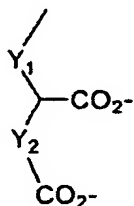


wherein R^1 , R^2 , R^7 , and R^8 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted C_1 - C_{10} alkyl group or a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, and R^1 and R^2 and/or R^7 and R^8 may bind to each other to form a ring; R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} and R^{12} independently represent a hydrogen atom, a substituted or unsubstituted C_1 - C_6 alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group, a halogen atom, cyano group, carboxyl group, or sulfo group, and R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} may bind to each other to form a ring; X^1 and X^2 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted C_1 - C_{15} alkyl group or a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group and X^1 and X^2 in total have 0 to 4 carboxyl groups, provided that when the number of the carboxyl group is 0 or 1, each of X^1 and X^2 is a C_1 - C_5 carboxyalkyl group or a sulfoalkyl group and at least one of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} represents a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group or a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group; m^1 represents 0 or 1; m^2 represents 0 or 1; m^3 represents 0 or 1; L^1 , L^2 , L^3 , L^4 , L^5 , L^6 , and L^7 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted methine group, provided that when two or more of the methine groups have substituents, the substituent may bind to each other to form a ring, provided that when each of X^1 and X^2 has one carboxyl group, each of X^1 and X^2 is carboxyl group-substituted hydrocarbon group and at least one of the methine groups represented by L^1 , L^2 , L^3 , L^4 , L^5 , L^6 , and L^7 is a substituted methine group and R^4 and R^{10}

represent a sulfo group; M represents a hydrogen atom, a metal, or a quaternary ammonium salt; and n represents an integer of 1 to 7 necessary for neutralizing charge.

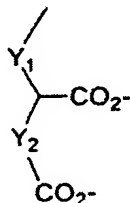
2. (Original) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein each of m^1 , m^2 , and m^3 is 1.

3. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1 or 2, wherein X^1 is a group represented by the following formula (i):



wherein Y^1 and Y^2 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted divalent linking group.

4. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1 or 2, wherein X^1 and X^2 independently represent a group represented by the following formula (i):



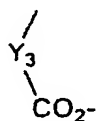
wherein Y^1 and Y^2 independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted a divalent bond.

5. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 4~~ Claim 1, wherein at least one of R^3 , R^4 , R^5 , R^6 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , and R^{12} is a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group or a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group.

6. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1 or 2, wherein at least one of R^4 , R^5 , R^{10} , and R^{11} is a substituted or unsubstituted aryl

group or a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group; and each of X¹ and X² is independently a C₁-C₅ carboxyalkyl group or a sulfoalkyl group.

7. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1 ~~or 2~~, wherein X¹ and X² independently represent a group represented by the following formula:



wherein Y³ represents a C₁-C₁₀ hydrocarbon group and at least one of the methine groups represented by L¹, L², L³, L⁴, L⁵, L⁶, and L⁷ is a substituted methine group and each of R⁴ and R¹⁰ is a sulfo group.

8. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to ~~any one of claims 3 or 4~~ Claim 3 wherein Y₁ represents -(CH₂)_pCONH- wherein p represents an integer of 1 to 4 and Y₂ represents -(CH₂)- or (CH₂)₂-.

9. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to ~~any of claims 1 to 8~~ Claim 1, which is used for tumor imaging.

10. (Currently Amended) The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to ~~any of claims 1 to 8~~ Claim 1, which is used for angiography.

11. (Currently Amended) A method of fluorescence imaging which comprises the steps of introducing the near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to ~~any of claims 1 to 8~~ Claim 1 into a living body, exposing said body to an excitation light, and detecting near infrared fluorescence from the contrast agent.